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Focusing on Teaching A New Perspective to Drive Teaching Quality

For years, education policymakers have worked hard to balance accountability with support to improve student performance. These efforts have resulted in the development of academic standards and assessments, and the beginnings of a data system that can help keep track of student progress over time. What has been longer in coming and more difficult to construct is a teacher development system that can provide an adequate supply of well trained teachers, deliver those teachers to classrooms where they are needed most, and ensure that they continue to thrive as they mature in the profession. The backbone of recent efforts to establish a coherent system, California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP), developed in 1997, was designed to "enable teachers to define and develop their practice." But other policies, including local hiring practices, awarding credits on the teacher salary schedule, and local professional development programs do not conform neatly to the state's CSTP-based framework and, in fact, largely exist outside the system.



Now California is in the position to take the next step to strengthen its public schools based research and agreement regarding what constitutes good teaching over the entire span of a teaching career. The creation of a broader, coherent, and consistent teacher development system will ensure every professional has the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skill necessary to be effective in the classroom. It must include a set of reliable measures of teachers' knowledge and skills that not only serve as the bridge between its major components – preparation, induction, professional development and accomplished teaching – but must provide the foundation for high-quality professional learning, relate well to the stages of a career, and reflect individual experience and context. A system of teacher development based on a consistent definition of high quality teaching can ultimately promote continuous improvement in teaching quality, resulting in improved student outcomes.

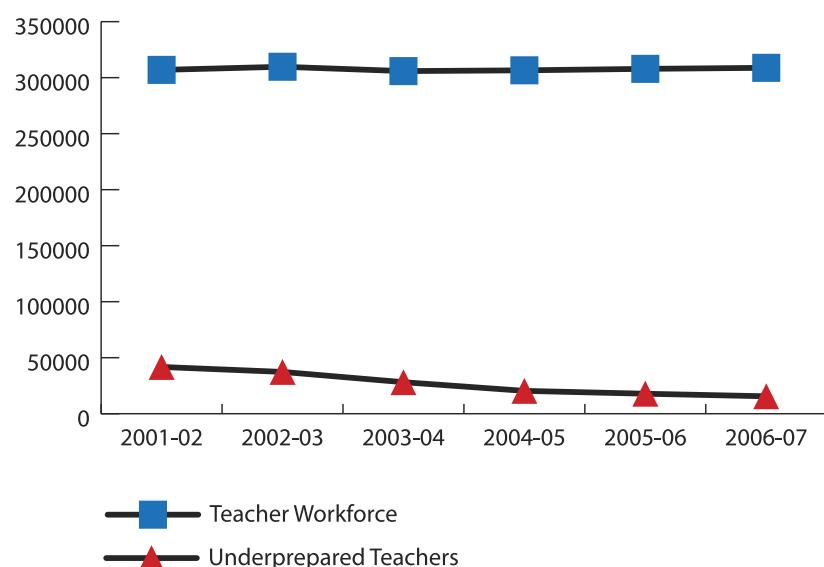
A Critical Opportunity: Broadening the Conversation Beyond Teacher Qualifications to Quality Teaching

The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning has long focused on building a strong teacher workforce in California, reporting on the status of teaching and, along with other important data, the number and distribution of underprepared teachers in the state (individuals assigned to classrooms who have not completed requirements for a teaching credential). Great progress has been made in reducing the numbers of

these underprepared teachers and ameliorating the maldistribution problem in California over the last five years. The fact that 95% of the state's classrooms now are staffed by fully prepared teachers, coupled with the fact that the growth in the teacher workforce has leveled off in the last several years, provides state policymakers the chance to broaden their attention beyond ensuring that those who enter the classroom are qualified to teach to addressing the quality of teaching in our schools (Chart 1). This opportunity, however, will not last long since almost one-third of the state's teacher workforce are baby boom teachers who are expected to retire in the next ten years.

Chart 1: California Teacher Workforce

A Fresh Look at Teaching Quality



The Center recently convened a panel of experts composed of education practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to help navigate the field of teaching quality. A definition of high quality teaching emerged from the group at the conclusion of this work:

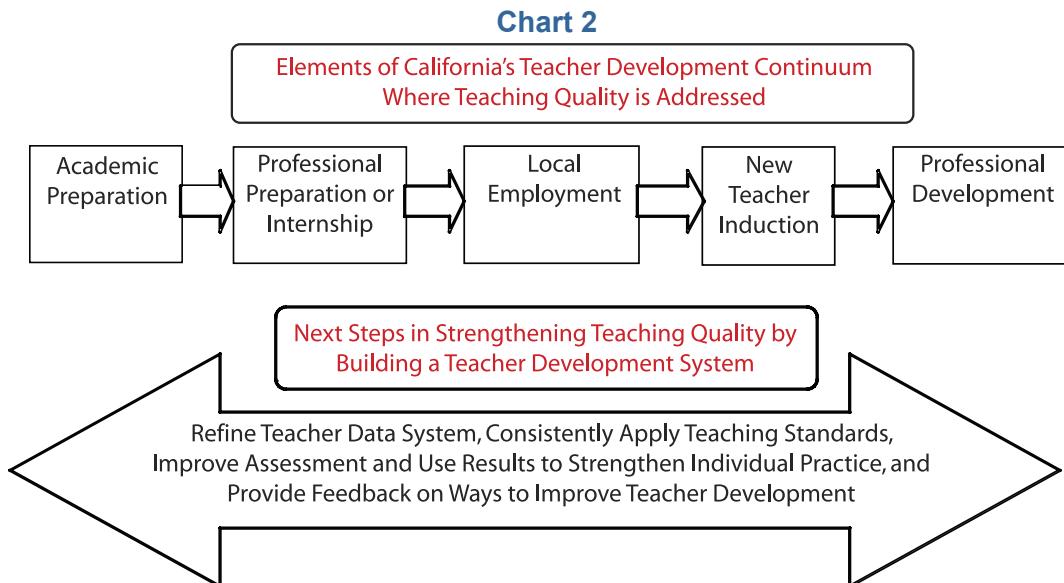
High-quality teaching occurs when teachers come to the classroom with a rich toolkit of knowledge and skills that they utilize following a set of effective practices, and which lead, over time, to student learning. High quality teaching occurs in a supportive environment where teachers work as part of a professional community within a workplace that fosters continuous learning on the part of children and adults.

The panel advised that policymakers use this new and deeper understanding of high quality teaching as the foundation for the development of a teacher development system and the base upon which the state's future teaching policy and practice is built.

Moving Toward a Teacher Development System

Currently, California has in place a teacher development continuum – components of workforce development that do not consistently inform one another as a teacher progresses in his or her career. Weaving this continuum together into the teacher development **system** we envision will require state policy action to strengthen and connect the various independent components in ways that do not currently exist. It is important to note that the system we have in mind will take time to develop and must be flexible, dynamic and responsive to California's changing demographics and student needs – a system that "learns" and adapts to needed changes. At the heart of such a system would be sound, reliable data used wisely by all parties to inform policy and strengthen practice.

As outlined in Chart 2, looking across the current teacher development continuum, it is apparent that four significant weaknesses undermine the evolution of a teacher development system: (1) inadequate collection, use and sharing of good teacher data, (2) inconsistent application of existing standards for the teaching profession, (3) inadequate measurements of teaching quality, and (4) inadequate use of the results of existing assessments to support teacher development.



While a good deal of information about the teacher workforce is collected at the state and local levels, it is rarely organized and shared to promote policy making that supports good teaching practice. For over a decade, the Center has called for the development of a longitudinal, statewide teacher database as a way of understanding important trends that influence preparation, recruitment, hiring, persistence rates and other workforce factors. Currently the development of such a database, the California Longitudinal Teacher Integrated Data Education System (CALTIDES), is under way. But progress on the development of CALTIDES has been slow and the information included in the first phase of development will be limited.

Although California policymakers have made concerted efforts to build a coherent framework for teaching quality that is based on the California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTPs), policies vary by component relative to the extent to which they incorporate or are aligned with these standards. Some policies – like the standards for teacher preparation and induction programs – are aligned with the CSTPs and represent a major step forward in lending coherence to the state's approach to improving teaching quality.

But other policies do not conform neatly to the state's framework. These include local policies governing hiring, awarding credits on the teacher salary schedule, and implementation of local professional development programs. How these policies define and measure teaching quality varies from district to district across the state resulting in a lack of consistency over the span of teachers' careers.

Using Assessment and Evaluation to Strengthen Teaching

Over the last decade, California has built multiple measures to examine teaching quality within each of the components of the teacher development continuum. But the measures are often disjointed, the results are not regularly shared among the programs or the people who can use them, and teachers themselves rarely get the meaningful feedback they need to improve their own practice. However, assessments within each of the components of the teacher development continuum represent an opportunity to strengthen teaching quality. These opportunities can be enhanced through thoughtful policy development and implementation that uses a common definition of teaching quality as the unifying factor.

For example, prospective teachers are assessed many times, starting when they apply for their preparation programs, through their coursework and student teaching. The Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA), which will become a requirement with the 2008-09 school year, represents a culminating summative evaluation of teacher strengths as well as those areas where candidates need additional support and guidance. These assessments can be shared productively among those who use this information to better prepare teachers. The assessment information can also follow candidates into the labor market giving hiring principals and other support providers an informed basis for designing individualized induction support for new teachers. Finally, performance reviews, which historically do not measure teaching quality well, can build on these iterative assessments to set professional goals and frame teachers' professional development.

The Center View

California needs a teacher development system that is based on a common definition of teaching quality and which will ensure that all of the state's students have access to effective teachers. The components of such a system are already in place. Now it is up to state and local policymakers to embrace its construction as a priority. We urge them to complete this work by using the definition of high quality teaching developed by the Center's expert panel as a framework for accelerating and expanding the implementation of CALTIDES; encouraging the broader use of CSTPs; and reviewing, improving, and better utilizing assessments at each level of teacher development to strengthen practice. The panel's sound, practical advice regarding the evolution of a teacher development system is offered to policymakers for their careful consideration:

Advice to Policymakers from the Teaching Quality Panel

- Statements about teaching quality should be based on good measures rather than on ad hoc assumptions. It is important to use sound data as the basis for analyzing teaching quality and strengthening practice.
- Teaching is too complex to be reduced to a single input or output. Similarly, efforts to support teaching quality are too complex to be reduced to a quick fix. Attention needs to be paid to all aspects that support quality teaching—the teaching surround—including leadership, materials, facilities, and structure of the school day, among others.
- Policy changes needed to build and support quality teaching require attention to all segments of the system. However, policymakers cannot address the segments in isolation. Systemic change will require purposeful connections so that segments of the system work together and enhance one another rather than contradict one another.
- Teaching quality should be approached from a positive, rather than a negative, standpoint. Mirroring the assumptions that all students can learn if provided the right conditions, including quality teaching, policymakers need to create programs built on the assumption that all teachers can provide quality teaching if provided the appropriate supports and differentiated opportunities.

Though ambitious in scope, completing the construction of a thoughtful, data-based teacher development **system** will improve teaching quality and advance student learning.

This CenterView was based on the following reports, which are available for download from www.cftl.org.

Wechsler, M. E. & Shields, P. M. (2008). *Teaching Quality in California: A New Perspective to Guide Policy*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.

Wechsler, M., Tiffany-Morales, J., Campbell, A., Humphrey, D., Kim, D., Shields, P., & Wang, H. (2007). *The Status of the Teaching Profession 2007*. Santa Cruz, CA: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning.